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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 003181

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM KDEM NI  
SUBJECT: ALIYU MOHAMMED PREDICTS PRESIDENT OBASANJO WILL  
REMAIN IN POWER

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Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: Former National Security Advisor Lt. Gen. (Ret) Aliyu Mohammed Gusau believes that President Obasanjo will try to rig the upcoming Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) Convention so that it nominates as its presidential candidate Katsina Governor Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and Villa denizen Andy Uba for Vice President. Aliyu Mohammed believes that Obasanjo's choice of two manifestly unqualified candidates (Yar'Adua is ill and Uba has no political base) is a sure sign that he has no intention for elections to take place. He noted that the PDP has recently established Obasanjo as party leader "for life," thereby paving the way for him to continue to wield the real power in an administration nominally headed by a very sick man should he be forced to give up his position as President. However, Aliyu thinks that the elections will be "postponed" in a January/February timeframe, and will result in coordinated rioting in Lagos, Enugu, Port Harcourt, Abuja, Kano and Kaduna -- the first time in Nigeria's recent history that such coordinated protest will have taken place. Aliyu also thinks that there is a good chance that the PDP convention will reject Yar'Adua and Uba, despite Villa bribery and rigging; if Obasanjo is not successful on the first ballot with the Yar'Adua candidacy, the Convention will become open. Under those circumstances, Aliyu thinks his own candidacy for the Presidency still has a good chance for success. There is a comment in para 9. Beginning para 10 are biographical notes on Yar'Adua and Uba. End Summary.

¶2. (S) At his own request, Aliyu Mohammed called on the Ambassador the evening of December 11. He was accompanied by bodyguards and escorted by a chase car with MOPOL police, unusual for a person who as National Security Advisor routinely drove himself alone. The purpose of the visit was to argue to the Ambassador the unsuitability of Yar'Adua as President of Nigeria, and to present the Katsina governor's candidacy as part of President Obasanjo's efforts to retain power.

¶3. (S) Yar'Adua, Aliyu Mohammed said, suffers from a kidney disease and is on dialysis four times a week. In addition, he is subject to blackouts, probably related to epilepsy. He also suffers from other possibly unrelated mental conditions, is on constant medication for them, and has received psychiatric treatment in Germany. The dialysis machine was installed at the Katsina gubernatorial residence by the German construction firm Julius Berger (partially owned by

former Chief of state Ibrahim Babangida). Because of these illnesses, Aliyu continued, Yar'Adua has become a recluse, rarely leaving his Residence, and is almost unknown amongst the Northern power elite, except through his relationship with his brother, the venerated Shehu Yar'Adua, who was murdered by Abacha. Aliyu Mohammed noted that the younger Yar'Adua had never been part of his brother's political machine which, in fact, had been inherited by Vice President Atiku.

¶4. (S) Aliyu Mohammed, saying he was quoting Yar'Adua directly, said that Obasanjo had "ordered" the Katsina governor to contest for the Presidency. When Yar'Adua objected that the state of his health precluded it, Obasanjo countered that "God will cure you," and undertook to cover all medical expenses. When Yar'Adua said he had no money, Obasanjo organized financial angels, all associated with Transcorp and led by Northern millionaire Alhaji Aliko Dangote. This group is supplying the Yar'Adua campaign with 45 jeeps (of which four are armored), a war chest of 5 billion naira, and a rented jet. (Aliyu Mohammed said that Dangote and the other "Transcorp boys" seek a Yar'Adua presidency to facilitate their gaining control over most of Nigeria's oil and gas production.) Andy Uba, recently selected as PDP gubernatorial candidate for Anambra state, has been a "special assistant" to President Obasanjo; he has no independent power base of his own, and is widely disliked because of his arrogance. Aliyu Mohammed went on to say that the President had ordered the arrest of the chief of staff to Rivers State Governor Peter Odili to warn the latter away from seeking the vice presidential nomination himself.

¶5. (S) A few days ago, Aliyu continued, the PDP executive had changed the party's bylaws and established the position of "Party Chairman for Life", to which it appointed President Obasanjo. From this perch, Obasanjo could pull the strings

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of a Yar'Adua /Uba administration \* for the President, the fall-back option; he would still prefer to remain in office as President through delay of elections. However, Aliyu said, the selection of Yar'Adua and Uba is a clear sign that Obasanjo is not "serious" about holding elections at all. Obasanjo wants Independent National Elections Commission (INEC) Chairman Maurice Iwu to call for postponement of elections because of the breakdown in the registration procedures. Alternatively, Obasanjo is keeping open the possibility of firing Iwu and using that as the pretext for elections postponement. And then there is the good possibility that Yar'Adua will not survive the rigors of a Nigeria presidential campaign. His death could also be the pretext for postponing elections.

¶6. (S) A Yar'Adua/Uba PDP ticket, combined by the postponement of elections, Aliyu continued, would certainly lead to widespread unrest. He predicted coordinated rioting in all of Nigeria's major cities, probably in a late January/February timeframe. He said that Former chiefs of State Buhari and Babangida and Vice President Atiku are "talking," joined by Lagos Governor Tinubu ("who is fed up with Obasanjo"). However, Aliyu Mohammed continued, there is a good chance that Obasanjo will be stymied at the PDP convention. Despite Villa bribe-paying and manipulating of the delegates in other ways, he thought there was a good chance that the May, 2006 National Assembly defeat of Third Term would be repeated )- such is the revulsion at a Yar'Adua/Uba ticket. In fact, if the President is not successful on the first vote, Aliyu Mohammed predicted, the convention would be wide open. And that is where Aliyu thinks that his own presidential candidacy has a chance.

¶7. (S) Aliyu Mohammed said that last week, there had been an exchange of letters between Babangida and the President in which the former requested, and was denied, the support of the latter. Aliyu said that Babangida told him that he now has three options: not to run at all, because he considers

Yar'Adua a "younger brother" because of his relationship with the Shehu, or alternatively because he would throw his support to Aliyu Mohammed, "a close associate of some forty years". Or, Babangida will choose another political party as his platform, or, if the PDP convention does open up, he might throw his hat in the ring. NB: Babangida has announced on December 11 that he is withdrawing his candidacy for the PDP nomination ) for now.

¶8. (S) In response to the Ambassador's question as to who are the President's current advisors, Aliyu responded that the most important office holders are Minister of Information Frank Nweke (a Christian Ibo), Minister of Aviation Femi Fani Kayode (a Christian Yoruba) and Presidential Special Assistant on the Media, Remi Oyo (a Christian Yoruba). He said that Minister of Education Obi Ezekwesili and Attorney General Bayo Ojo no longer wield the influence over the President that they once did. Minister of the Federal Capital Territory El-Rufai is out because of his own alleged presidential ambitions; Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes commission Ribadu is also on the outs because his investigations have come a little too close to the President. But, he continued, Chris and Andy Uba and Tony Anenih remain important behind the scenes players, with the latter the "enforcer" of the President's will.

¶9. (S) Comment: This must be read in the context of Aliyu's own presidential ambition and his thorough disillusionment with President Obasanjo. Nevertheless, he is well connected with the traditional Northern establishment, with political links throughout the country. In our view, Obasanjo kept him on as National Security Advisor (and thereby the head of all of the security/intelligence services) as long as he did because he judged Aliyu as less dangerous inside the tent than out. The idea that President Obasanjo would continue to govern the country as Party Chairman for Life with the presidency occupied by a cipher is commonly referred to as "Plan B", and is widely believed. For example, much of what Aliyu told the Ambassador is gisted on a Nigerian website -- Elendu Reports carried an article by Jonathan Elendu, "Musa Yar'dua, An Unfit Candidate", dated December 10, 2006. Yar'Adua has been the beneficiary of a publicity boomlet from the Villa, but the President has signaled ) and then withdrawn ) his support for numerous other Northern governors. Uba as Vice Presidential nominee is new to us ) and seems highly improbable. However, should a Yar'Adua/Uba

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ticket emerge from the PDP convention, we, too, would question Villa commitment to successful elections. As for who is in and who is out at the Villa, we note that the Villa often appears to be a revolving door, with ins and outs regularly changing. End comment.

¶10. (C) Bio note: Alhaji Umaru Yar'Adua, a brother of the late Shehu Musa Yar'Adua, is a Hausa/Fulani Muslim from the royal family of Katsina Emirate and the current Governor of Katsina state. Umaru Yar'Adua was born in 1951 and holds Bachelors and Masters degrees in Chemistry from Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria. He became governor of Katsina in 1999 largely due to the popularity of his late brother, who died in prison in 1996 during the Abacha regime and the influence of General Aliyu Mohammed Gusau, the former NSA. Yar'Adua is soft-spoken and appears crowd-shy. He reportedly suffers from a kidney ailment and requires dialysis. He is also rumored to suffer from a mental illness, possibly clinical depression.

¶11. (C) Bio Note: Andy Uba until recently served as President Obasanjo's Senior Special Assistant on Domestic Matters, where he handled much of Obasanjo's personal business, including the day-to-day operations of the Ministry of Petroleum, and is widely believed to be one of the most powerful and closest aides to the President. Uba has picked up a ticket to contest for the Anambra State Gubernatorial elections. Emmanuel Andy Nnamdi Uba was born December 14,

1958 in what is now Anambra State and is a naturalized American citizen. (Uba reportedly also holds a Canadian passport.) He obtained a B.S. in geology from Concordia University in Montreal, Canada in 1984, a Masters degree from California State University in 1994 and a PhD in biological science from Buxton University, U.K. in 1996. He worked in the U.S. for several years in the 1990s, initially for Golden Mutual Insurance and later establishing a chain of health clinics that evaluated workman's compensation claims. He is married and has two children that we are aware of. His wife and children are also Amcits and rumored to be living in the U.S. Uba's wife is believed to be the cousin of Obasanjo's late wife, Stella.

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